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The disinformation industrial complex

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posted by Tapestry

Propaganda and Censorship — Two Sides of the Same Coin

Propaganda is as old as humanity itself, but the modern version of it can be traced back to 1948, when the CIA's Office of Special Projects launched Operation Mockingbird, a clandestine CIA media infiltration campaign that involved bribing hundreds of journalists to publish fake stories at the CIA's request.

The dismissal of conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorists as mentally unstable crackpots was one of the tactics invented by the CIA at this time. Its intent was (and still is) to marginalize and demoralize anyone who questions the fabricated narrative.

It's quite telling that Operation Mockingbird was launched the same year the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act (aka the Smith-Mundt Act) became law, which forbade the U.S. government from pushing propaganda onto the U.S. population.

This anti-propaganda law was repealed in 2013 by then-President Barack Obama. So, since July 2013, the U.S. government and CIA have been legally permitted to propagandize U.S. citizens. In addition to the simplification of global coordination of news by way of news agencies, this is yet another reason why propaganda has flourished and grown exponentially in recent years.

The undermining of free speech took off at the end of 2016, when Obama signed into law the Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act, which opened the door to an offensive information war against the public.

But for propaganda to be truly successful, especially in the long term, you also need censorship — a concept wildly opposed in the U.S. until recently — and censorship, at least in America, requires the undermining of free speech rights.

As noted by Siegel, the effort to undercut free speech really took off at the end of 2016, when Obama signed into law the Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act, which opened the door to "an open-ended, offensive information war" against the general public.

Seemingly overnight, "misinformation" and "disinformation" were said to pose an urgent existential threat to national security, freedom, democracy and, later, to public health. We're now told we must eliminate misinformation to preserve free speech, which is so twisted that no Constitutionally-literate person can make sense of it.



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The Acceleration of Free Speech Elimination

By repealing the Smith-Mundt Act, and signing into law the Countering Foreign Propaganda and Disinformation Act, Obama laid the legal groundwork for government control of speech in the U.S. Since then, a sprawling disinformation industrial complex has emerged, which seeks to control the internet and all information in it.

As described by Siegel, the U.S. national security infrastructure has now fused with social media platforms, which is where the information war is being fought. The national mobilization against disinformation has also been expanded from a whole-of-government approach to a whole-of-society approach.

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Brian Gerrish
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The Murder of Reality: Evidence of an Alien Culture in the Written Word

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Advanced Technology in Our Hidden Past



In a 2018 document, the State Department's Global Engagement Center (GEC) calls for "leveraging expertise from across government, tech and marketing sectors, academia, and NGO's." "This is how the government-created 'war against disinformation' became the great moral crusade of its time," Siegel writes.

Of course, media have also played a significant role in the "whole-of-society response" to disinformation, but they are "by far the weakest player in the counter-disinformation complex," Seigel notes, adding:³

"The American press, once the guardian of democracy, was hollowed out to the point that it could be worn like a hand puppet by the U.S. security agencies and party operatives.

It would be nice to call what has taken place a tragedy, but an audience is meant to learn something from a tragedy. As a nation, America not only has learned nothing, it has been deliberately prevented from learning anything while being made to chase after shadows.

This is not because Americans are stupid; it's because what has taken place is not a tragedy but something closer to a crime. Disinformation is both the name of the crime and the means of covering it up; a weapon that doubles as a disguise.

The crime is the information war itself, which was launched under false pretenses and by its nature destroys the essential boundaries between the public and private and between the foreign and domestic, on which peace and democracy depend.

By conflating the anti-establishment politics of domestic populists with acts of war by foreign enemies, it justified turning weapons of war against American citizens. It turned the public arenas where social and political life take place into surveillance traps and targets for mass psychological operations.

The crime is the routine violation of Americans' rights by unelected officials who secretly control what individuals can think and say. What we are seeing now, in the revelations exposing the inner workings of the state-corporate censorship regime, is only the end of the beginning.

The United States is still in the earliest stages of a mass mobilization that aims to harness every sector of society under a singular technocratic rule.

The mobilization, which began as a response to the supposedly urgent menace of Russian [election] interference, now evolves into a regime of total information control that has arrogated to itself the mission of eradicating abstract dangers such as error, injustice, and harm — a goal worthy only of leaders who believe themselves to be infallible, or comic-book supervillains."

Phase 2 of the Information War — Total Control

The COVID pandemic was a significant part of Phase 1 in the information war, although the war on public perception began years earlier. As noted by Siegel, the COVID phase was "marked by distinctively human displays of incompetence and brute-force intimidation." Phase 2 will undoubtedly be carried out by artificial intelligence, now thoroughly trained to identify the greatest triggers of fear and panic, both on an individual and societal basis.

We can also expect censorship by algorithm. It will no longer be a game of whack-a-mole with humans tagging posts and requesting their removal. Instead, messages containing certain words simply won't go anywhere and won't be seen. Spoken and written key words will be automatically flagged and deleted or barred from posting by AI.

AI-based bots and "sock puppets" (fake accounts) can also be launched across platforms and be algorithmically amplified to alter the perceptions of billions in real time. We saw this trend emerging during the first round of COVID, where multiple accounts were posting the same "original" message, verbatim, at the same time.

As noted by Siegel, the end goal of all this information wrangling is control. Not partial control, but total. Over everything and everyone. This is also why we will never see a government authority admit they spread disinformation themselves, even though, technically, they've been guilty of such on numerous occasions over the last three years.

They dismissed the Hunter Biden laptop as Russian disinformation, even though U.S. intelligence had proof that it, and its contents, were real. They claimed the lab leak theory was a racist conspiracy, even though, privately, the scientific consensus was that the virus came from a lab. They told us the COVID jabs would stop transmission, even though that was never tested in the first place. The list goes on.

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“Disinformation, now and for all time, is whatever they say it is,” Siegel writes.⁴ “That is not a sign that the concept is being misused or corrupted; it is the precise functioning of a totalitarian system.”

Partners in Crime

Siegel isn't the only one calling out the information war as a crime. In another Tablet article titled “Partners in Crime,”⁵ New Civil Liberties Alliance attorney Jenin Younes reviews evidence from the Missouri legal case⁶ against the Biden administration showing how government and Big Tech built “a whole-of-system censorship campaign” in clear violation of the First Amendment.

Internal Meta documents obtained by the House Judiciary Committee’s Select Subcommittee on Weaponization of the Federal Government in July 2023 has also fleshed out the story of how state-sponsored censorship came to be the official policy of so many private companies.

The evidence shows that Facebook and other social media companies did not take it upon themselves to become arbiters of truth. Rather, they were aggressively pressured to do so by Biden administration officials, and officials within various federal agencies. Sometimes they did meekly follow the direction given, but even in cases where they tried to push back, they eventually had to fall in line for fear of government retaliation.

“While other lawsuits alleging First Amendment violations based on government involvement in social media censorship have been filed over the past two years, Missouri [v. Biden] has proven uniquely successful,” Younes writes.⁷

“When the complaint was filed in May of 2022, the main proof the Missouri plaintiffs had were public statements from high-ranking members of the administration, including former White House Press Secretary Jennifer Psaki, Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, and President Biden himself.

The plaintiffs cited public statements of government officials unabashedly proclaiming they were flagging posts for social media companies to censor; openly criticizing the companies for inadequate removal of content (especially anything that cast doubt on the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines); accusing tech executives of ‘killing people’ for not adequately censoring so-called misinformation; and threatening to hold them accountable should they refuse to comply.

Judge Terrence Doughty ordered discovery at an early stage of litigation ... For the first time, the public became aware of the Biden administration’s clandestine censorship operation, which began a mere three days after President Biden’s inauguration ...

By February of 2021, then-White House Director of Digital Media Robert Flaherty had intensified the administration’s tactics ... He began bullying companies — using expletives, wielding accusations, and making demands — in his efforts to get them to remove content that he claimed might cause people to decline vaccines ...

On numerous occasions, Brian Rice and other Meta employees sent the White House detailed lists of agreed-upon policy changes after initial attempts to assuage Mr. Flaherty’s wrath proved unsuccessful.

On July 4 of this year, Judge Doughty granted the plaintiffs’ request for a preliminary injunction in Missouri, observing that ‘the present case arguably involves the most massive attack against free speech in United States’ history,’ and describing the administration’s censorship regime as akin to an ‘Orwellian Ministry of Truth.’

Crucial to the outcome was the court’s finding⁸ that the Biden administration and various federal executive agencies coerced, pressured, and encouraged social media companies to suppress First Amendment protected speech, converting otherwise private action into that of the state.

The core principle at issue, which forbids the government to co-opt private industry to circumvent constitutional prohibitions, is known as ‘state action doctrine.’ Without it, the Bill of Rights would be worthless.

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Police could, for instance, hire a private company to search your home despite lacking probable cause, in order to get around the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against warrantless searches and seizures. Or the government could evade the guarantees of Equal Protection in the 14th Amendment by funding racially segregated private schools.

The judge agreed with the plaintiffs in Missouri v. Biden that ... since the First Amendment prohibits government from abridging freedom of speech, the Constitution cannot be read to permit government to commandeer private companies to accomplish its viewpoint-based censorship aims."

Direct Evidence of Coercion

While the initial evidence suggested the Biden administration was the driving force behind the media censorship, it was still circumstantial. That changed in late July 2023, when internal Meta documents were obtained by the Subcommittee on Weaponization of the Federal Government.

According to Younes, "These documents tie the knot: They unequivocally establish that but for the Biden administration's strong-arm tactics, certain viewpoints would not have been suppressed."

For example, in a July 2021 email, Meta's head of global affairs, Nick Clegg, asked Brian Rice, who was in charge of Facebook's content policy, why they had removed, rather than flagged or demoted, claims that SARS-CoV-2 was manmade.

Rice replied, "Because we were under pressure from the [Biden] administration and others to do more and it was part of the 'more' package." He ended the email saying, "We shouldn't have done it."

"Not only did Rice explicitly state that pressure from the White House caused Meta to remove content endorsing the lab leak theory of COVID's origins, he also expressed remorse for this decision.

These new documents also prove that the removal of 'vaccine discouraging content' occurred because of government pressure," Younes writes.

Clegg, for example, told Andy Slavitt, former White House senior adviser for the COVID response, that removing humorous memes disparaging the COVID jab — as demanded by Slavitt — "would represent a significant incursion into traditional boundaries of free expression in the U.S." Slavitt insisted and brushed off Clegg's concerns as immaterial, and in the end, Clegg acquiesced to avoid potential retaliation.

Quid Pro Quo

Younes continues:⁹

"The White House's coercive tactics had the desired effect. Both Clegg and [Meta COO Sheryl] Sandberg urged acquiescence to avoid adverse consequences. In Clegg's words, 'Sheryl is keen that we continue to explore some moves that we can make to show that we are trying to be responsive to the WH.'

He explained that the company's 'current course ... is a recipe for protracted and increased acrimony with the WH as the vaccine roll out continues to stutter through the Fall and Winter. Given the bigger fish we have to fry with the Administration — data flows etc — that doesn't seem a great place for us to be.'

Thus, 'given what is at stake here, it would also be a good idea if we could regroup to take stock of where we are in our relations with the WH, and our internal methods too.' The 'data flow' referenced a dispute Meta was having with the European Union at the time over transfer of users' data. If resolved in favor of the EU, Meta could face significant fines.

As Twitter files journalist Michael Shellenberger and his co-authors recently explained in analyzing this exchange, 'the series of events suggests a quid pro quo. Facebook would bow to White House requests for censorship in exchange for its help with the European Union.'"

First Amendment Seeks to Prevent Suppression of Dissent

As noted by Younes, President Biden had promised to make mass vaccination against COVID central to his agenda. The problem was, a great many Americans didn't feel comfortable being injected with an experimental gene therapy

that had no long-term safety data.

This was an impediment to Biden's political agenda, and rather than acknowledging that the mass vaccination campaign was ill received, the White House simply scapegoated social media instead.

It was their fault that Americans weren't rolling up their sleeves in sufficient numbers. Internal Meta emails attest to the fact that employees felt they were being used as scapegoats whenever the vaccination campaign wasn't going as hoped.

"A government using its power to suppress dissent is precisely what the First Amendment sought to prevent," Younes notes.

"Freedom of speech is a principal pillar of a free government: When this support is taken away, the constitution of a free society is dissolved," Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers, famously wrote.

The first president of the United States, George Washington, once said, 'If men are to be precluded from offering their sentiments on a matter, which may involve the most serious and alarming consequences that can invite the consideration of mankind, reason is of no use to us; the freedom of speech may be taken away, and dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter.'

Let us hope that when the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and probably the Supreme Court, consider these cases in the upcoming months, they interpret the First Amendment as the Constitution's Framers understood it. Otherwise, the future of free speech, and liberty itself, is in grave danger."

In closing, while Younes recognizes the terrible threat state-sponsored censorship poses, he doesn't follow the bread crumbs as far as Siegel does. Younes seems to believe the government censorship network came about to protect Biden's political goals, but it's way bigger than that.

Like Siegel states, the end goal is global control. To get there, those seeking that control must create a total stranglehold on all information, because that's how you best control a population.

What's more, this stranglehold is global. It's not an American phenomenon that sprung up because Biden wanted to get a jab in every arm. COVID censorship is happening in every country, and every country needs to investigate what role, if any, their governments played in the suppression of truth.

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In a March 28, 2023, article titled "A Guide to Understanding the Hoax of the Century,"^{1,2} Jacob Siegel, senior editor of Tablet magazine's afternoon news digest, News and The Scroll, discusses the emergence of the "disinformation industrial complex," which is the topic of his forthcoming book.

The United States has been unique in its dedication to free speech, but that Constitutional right is rapidly eroding in the name of national security and protecting public health.

Siegel traces the early days of the information war to Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who in 1950 claimed to have proof of a communist spy ring within the U.S. State Department. Initially, he claimed to have the names of 205 communist spies. A day later, he revised it to 57. However, the inconsistency is not the point.

"The point was the power of the accusation," Siegel says. "For more than half a century, McCarthyism stood as a defining chapter in the worldview of American liberals: a warning about the dangerous allure of blacklists, witch hunts, and demagogues."

Blacklists and Witch Hunts Return

By 2017, American liberals had seemingly forgotten that lesson, as mainstream media pundits accused Donald Trump of being a Manchurian candidate installed by Russia. An organization called Hamilton 68 claimed to have proof showing hundreds of Russian-affiliated Twitter accounts manipulated the U.S. election to get Trump into the White House.

As it turns out, none of these accusations were true and Hamilton 68 turned out to be a "high-level hoax." Most of the accounts were Americans engaged in organic conversations, which Hamilton 68 arbitrarily described as "Russian scheming." Twitter's safety officer, Yoel Roth, even admitted the company had labeled "real people" — again, mostly Americans — as "Russian stooges without evidence or recourse."

A key difference between the McCarthy and Hamilton 68 episodes was that journalists, U.S. intelligence agencies and Congressional members didn't swallow McCarthy's accusations without chewing. When the witch hunt against Trump took off, anyone who questioned the accusations was attacked as a co-conspirator.

Media even refused to report on the evidence proving that Hamilton 68 was a complete scam. The level of disinterest in the truth suggested that American liberalism "had lost faith in the promise of freedom and embraced a

new ideal," Siegel writes.



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